1083
C!N
Aqua Leung

Smith & Maybury: Aqua Men

Most teenagers dream of making waves in the world... but when Aqua Leung talks about making waves, he has something very different in mind!

Aqua (who first appeared in Image's ***Popgun*** anthology) is the star of the eponymous ***Aqua Leung***, a 208-page graphic novel that chronicles one person's quest to fulfill his destiny. In this original work by ***Amazing Joy Buzzards'*** writer/creator *Mark Andrew Smith* and artist *Paul Maybury*, "an average boy named Aqua suddenly learns the truth about his origin, including his father's savage murder at the hands of those in fear of his power," Smith told ***CSN.*** "He must now begin a journey to take back his father's kingdom from the evil shark king and restore himself as the one, true unifier of the seas.

"Each Sea Kingdom that Aqua must conquer is ruled by a different over sized despot who holds a scepter of great power. With every scepter that Aqua collects in battle his power grows more and more and and he must struggle with the burden of this responsibility."

Just who is Aqua, and what's the nature of his quest? "Aqua Leung is the son of a slain octopus god, and he wants to conquer everything on Earth and beyond," Smith explained. "He's got huge shoes to fill in his quest for revenge, and to set things right again in the seas.

"Aqua begins as a really cute kid and you know at the beginning of the book that he's going to grow up into something really evil. How he gets there is most of the fun. But you know him as a child and identify with him as the main character of the book and you're rooting for him all the way.

"At its core, ***Aqua Leung*** is a story about power and how you can get lost in your quest for having to hold onto that power and is it worth the final toll on a person. His journey is epic and a dark one of discovery and revelations about his past and who he is."

"This is partially a story about seeing someone become the anti hero as Mark said, and about a kid growing up at war without parents. You can imagine that he is very impressionable, and this lends to a very quick character development which I think makes for an interesting graphic novel."

While the story is set in Atlantis, this isn't the typical underwater milieu seen in such books as ***Aquaman*** or ***Namor, The Sub-Mariner.*** What inspired this different take on the lost continent? " love this done-to-death genre in spirit, but we really just wanted to use it as a setting and leave it at that," Maybury explained. "There's no point in trying to do the Image version of ***Aquaman***. That would be pointless, and not fun for anyone—except for maybe the underwater-comics-super-fans-club (Sorry, guys!...). I hope the reader just registers that they're underwater and moves on and enjoys it without comparisons."

" It's easy to get lost in all the trappings of Atlantis, but I think that people are at the core of ***Aqua Leung***," Smith added. "Ultimately, it's about strong characters and conflict."

Aqua Leung has a deceptively simple look that might lead some to think it's a kid's book, but it becomes clear in the first few pages that there's a harder edge to this story. Who do the creators see as the target audience, and what motivated them to go for a more mature edge to this storyline?

"For me, my intention was to do an indie book in wolves' clothing," Maybury said. "I don't think a lot of people that draw the way I do are offered epic action books that often. Maybe we're roped in to do a 'har har, look at this *indie* take on superheroes, It's adorable!' kind of projects. But in America, there just doesn't seem to be a lot of this combination going on—which is silly, but I'm hoping to see a lot more in the future. So in my eyes the target audience should be a bit of a mixed bag. Or rather, people who are looking for something a little fresh and fun."

"When we set out to do ***Aqua,*** for Paul and me it was never a question of 'who's our target market?' or 'What's hot this month?'" Smith added. "Our logic was to create a book that we were both passionate and excited about bringing to life, a book in whose creation there was a sense of discovery and wonder on our part. In that process of creation and energy, we knew that by making something we'd enjoy on all levels as readers that we were creating something that was true, bold, daring, and that our vision would be infectious and reach a large audience.

"We really wanted to genre bend and defy people's expectations of comics and take the graphic album a step further and push it a lot from where it's been and show people just where original graphic novels can go. I think what we're doing is pretty original and in many ways new for comics."

Aqua Leung has a surreal, sometimes disquieting, almost Lovecraftean feel to it; was that intentional? "I think that's very true," Smith agreed.

"Yeah, Lovecraftean without the racism," Maybury joked. "*H.P. Lovecraft* was really a master of building up psychological states of a character in a story and you'd get this really cool sense of impeding doom as you read it," Smith continued. "So at the beginning of our story—and in other parts—you get a real sense of hopelessness and fatality within the first pages; but then, once we get to our character, it switches off and the reader has a really good anchor and attachment built for him."

How did Smith and Maybury end up collaborating on this project? "We're both friends with Sean 'Cheeks' Galloway," Smith said. "Originally I wanted to do a different project and work with Paul on it, but then we started talking about ***Aqua Leung*** and moved on to make this the project we were going to work on together."

In a medium dominated by serialized projects that are subsequently collected into trade paperback format, Smith and Maybury went against the trend: they chose to create a finished 208-page full-color graphic novel. What led to their decision to complete a project this large prior to releasing parts of it in serialized form? "The graphic novel format really gave us a lot of freedom and room to try out new things, and to give our book a truly epic feel and pace in storytelling and page turning," Smith said. " It's a lot of work to put up front, but I think a lot of people really like being able to read a new story in one sitting. The original graphic novel is smart business because everyone is reading it for the first time ever."

Maybury thinks this transition to original graphic novels might become more prevalent over the next few years. "I've been guilty of just waiting for trades these days," Maybury said. "I just think it's necessary for the American market to transition and model the immensely successful manga market. I've long since traded my long boxes for nice bookshelves. I look like more of an adult when my non-comic-book-reader friends come over, too."

Some have described ***Aqua Leung*** as "part ***Bone,*** part *Gahan Wilson.*" Do Smith and Maybury see any validity to the description? "I can certainly see the comparison to ***Bone*** in many of Paul's pages, and I think that's accurate," Smith said.

"Hey, *Jeff Smith* and *Gahan Wilson* are not bad people to be compared to," Maybury said. "I had seen a lot of ***Gahan Wilson*** and his peers in the 80's as I was growing up, so it's only natural that that imagery slips into my current art. *Jeff Smith* fits into what I was saying earlier about people with 'indie' styles doing an epic adventure and it being a perfect marriage. You would think by now there would be a lot more of this catching on than what's being done today."

While ***Aqua Leung*** is a hefty standalone graphic novel, it's not the entirity of young Aqua's saga. "We want to do at least two more volumes and have them out once a year," Smith said. "We'll see how it goes, but I think that two more is very realistic to do and about the right length for the full story and to really hit our marks and give everything a good closure. I like it when series are planned to be finite.

"But it's important that readers know that each book is a self-contained story," Maybury added. "You'll read ***Aqua Leung 1*** and be satisfied, and you will not be left hanging. You'll want to know what happens in the grand scheme of things, but no unfun cliff hangers here."

Aqua Leung, a 208-page full-color graphic novel from Image Comics, is scheduled for mid-April release.

by Cliff Biggers

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

The following comics and comics-related books are tentatively slated for release on the dates given; if no date is given, the books are tentatively scheduled for release sometime in the month of February. It's very common for items to be delayed for a variety of reasons, so none of these dates are guaranteed. For the latest information on shipping and publishing delays, talk to the friendly folks at the comic shop where you got this issue of CSN! And yes, we are aware that some publishers regularly run an average of a month or so late on many of their titles—nevertheless, we go by the schedules they provide.

Please note that, due to the New Year's Holidays, books will arrive on Friday, January 4th.

NOTE: At the request of many retailers, fans, and publishers, we have added Diamond Comic Distributors' code numbers after the publisher's name for each item; this will assist in placing special orders, etc.

○**100 BULLETS #90** 4/16 Vertigo/DC FEB080292 $2.99
○**100 PERCENT PERFECT GIRL GN VOL 5 (OF 4)** NetComics FEB083932 $9.99
○**1001 ARABIAN NIGHTS ADVENTURES OF SINBAD #0** Zenescope FEB084165 $0.99
○**2 GUNS TP** Boom FEB083587 $14.99
○**2000 AD #1576** 4/9 Rebellion JAN083848 $4.50
○**2000 AD #1577** 4/9 Rebellion JAN083849 $4.50
○**2000 AD #1578** 4/9 Rebellion JAN083850 $4.50
○**2000 AD #1579** 4/9 Rebellion JAN083851 $4.50
○**2000 AD EXTREME ED #28** Rebellion JAN083852 $5.99
○**50 MANGA BABES TO DRAW AND PAINT SC** 4/2 Barrons FEB084274 $21.99
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○**99 #7** 4/16 Teshkeel FEB084009 $2.99
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○**ABYSS #4 (OF 4)** 4/23 Red 5 FEB083989 $2.95
○**ACTION COMICS #864** 4/30 DC FEB080212 $2.99
Superman attempts to get back to his life as Clark Kent, but when you're the world's greatest hero there's trouble around every corner, behind every planet and within every dimension—as Geoff Johns & Gary Frank demonstrate
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Collects Adam Strange stories from Mystery in Space #s 81-91, Hawkman #18, & Strange Adventures #157
○**ADOLESCENT RADIOACTIVE BLACK BELT HAMSTERS #4** Dynamite FEB083641 $3.50
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○**ADVENTURES OF TYMM: ALIEN CIRCUS #1 (OF 3)** Platinum FEB083968 $5.95

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○**AIR GEAR GN VOL 8** Del Rey FEB083658 $10.95
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○**ALL NEW OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE A TO Z PREMIUM HC VOL 2** 4/23 Marvel FEB082293 $24.99

○**ALL STAR BATMAN & ROBIN THE BOY WONDER #10** 4/30 DC FEB080203 $2.99
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○**AQUA LEUNG GN VOL 1** 4/30 Image FEB082122 $19.99
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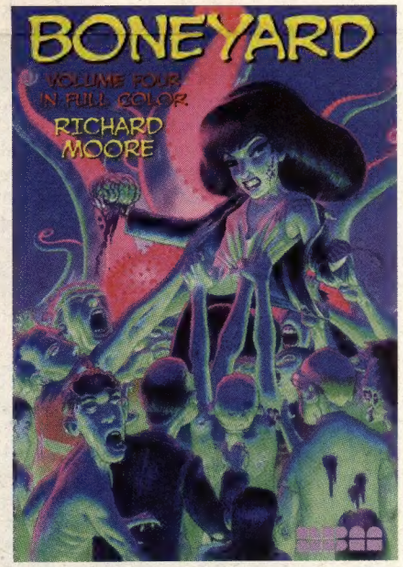

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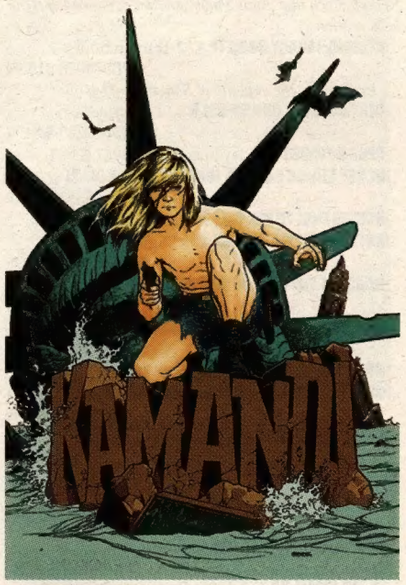

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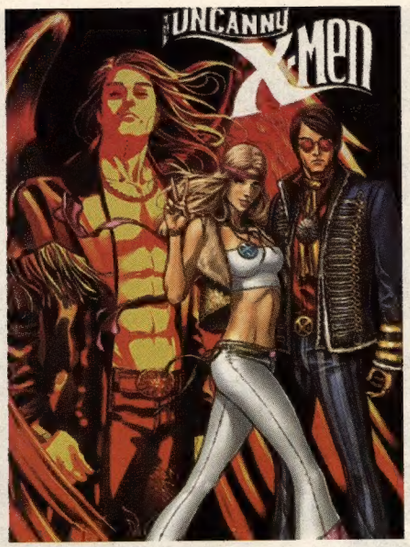

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